

II. THE PERSECUTED CHURCH - 100 AD - 313 AD

From the completion of the New Testament to the
Edict of
Constantine.

This sets forth the period when the church was
crushed beneath
the iron heel of pagan Rome, yet it never gave
out such sweet
fragrance to God as in those two centuries of
almost constant
martyrdom.

A. Smyrna - "crushed" - It comes from the root
word *myrrh*, the myrrh plant had to be
crushed in order to emit its sweet fragrance. -
Rev. 2:8-11

B. Causes of Imperial persecutions

1. Heathen worship hospitable;
Christianity exclusive
2. Idol worship interwoven with life
 - a. Images stood in many houses to
receive adoration
 - b. Sacrifices were made to gods at
festivals
 - c. Images were worshipped at civil
ceremonies
 - d. Christians were not fitting in with
Pagan society

3. Emperor worship
 - a. Christians would not worship the emperor
 - b. Christians spoke of another king
 - c. Christians were looked upon as being disloyal to the empire
 4. Judaism recognized
 - a. Christians had been considered a sect of Judaism, an allowed religion
 - b. Christianity stood alone after the destruction of Jerusalem with no laws to protect them
 5. Secret meetings
 - a. The secret meetings of Christians aroused suspicion
 - b. They met in secret to protect themselves from persecution
 6. Equality in the church
 - a. Christians looked upon all men as equal
 - b. Destroyed the social order of the nobles
 7. Business interests

- profitable
 - a. Christianity meant an end to the business of making idols
- persecution of
 - b. The craftsmen supported the the Christians – Acts 19: 24-28

C. The stages of persecution

- intense
 - 1. The church experienced ten periods of persecution at the hands of Roman emperors
(“Ye shall have tribulation ten days:” – Rev. 2:10)

2. The Great Persecution

In 303 AD The Emperor Diocletian began the tenth and fiercest persecution of Christians.

- from the
 - a. An attempt to remove Christianity face of the earth. (It is said that Diocletion erected a pillar inscribed, “In honour of the extirpation of the Christian superstition.”)
 - b. Many Christians were burned alive.
 - c. Christians were eaten by wild beasts in the arena.
(The beasts became sick of human flesh and would no longer attack.)
 - d. Soldiers became weary of killing helpless, unarmed people and

threw their swords away

D. Leaders of the persecuted church.

1 Ignatius - Bishop of Antioch in Syria.

a. Pupil of the Apostle John

b. A powerful preacher of the

Gospel.

2 Justin Martyr - He had been a philosopher, and continued teaching after his conversion. He wrote several books which are still in existence that give us much information about this period. One of his prominent works is Dialogue With Trypho, a treatise refuting the Judiazers. (Rev. 2:9)

3 Polycarp - Bishop of Smyrna at Asia Minor

a. He was taught as a youth by the Apostle John

b. A mighty messenger to his generation.

4 Irenaeus - Bishop of Lyons

a. A student of Polycarp

b. Stressed the fundamental Christian doctrines

(1) Opposition from the Gnostics

(2) Some of his writings still survive today

E. Prominent Martyrs

1. Simeon - Successor of James as head of the Jerusalem church. He was crucified by order of the Roman governor of Palestine in 107 AD. during the reign of Trajan.

2. Ignatius - He was thrown to the wild beasts in the Coliseum. Standing in the arena as the lions approached him, Ignatius prayed:

"I thank Thee O Lord, that Thou hast vouchsafed thus to honour me. I am God's grain, to be Ground between the teeth of wild beasts, so that I may become a holy loaf for the Lord."

3. Polycarp - When the Roman governor called upon him to deny Christ and threatened to burn him alive, Polycarp answered:

"Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and He has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me? You threaten the fire that burns for an hour and then is quenched; but you know not of the fire of the judgement to come, and not of the fire of the eternal punishment. Bring what you will."

He was then burned to death in Smyrna in 155 AD

4. Justin Martyr - He was beheaded at Rome in 167 AD His last words were:

"I am a Christian, having been freed by Christ, and by the grace of Christ, I partake of the same hope."

5. Blandina - A Christian slave girl.
Tortured from morning until night declared:
*"I am a Christian, and no evil is
committed among us."*

6. Perpetua and Felicitas - A noble lady in
Carthage, Perpetua, and her slave
Felicitas were killed by wild beasts in 203
AD

F. Formation of the New Testament Canon.

1 The word canon means a rod, rule or
measuring device.

2 Refers to the Biblical books that were
judged to be of Divine origin (inspired -
God breathed) and included as part of THE
BIBLE.

3 No precise date can be given for the
full recognition of the New Testament
canon, but it can not be placed earlier
than 300 AD.

G. False teaching arose during this period.

1 Gnostics - Taught that people could be
saved by secret knowledge. (*Gnosis* - Greek
word for knowledge.)

2 Ebionites - Judiazers

H. Condition of the church

1 Purified through persecution

2 Unified teaching

3 A growing church

The devil sought to destroy Christianity through persecution, but persecution only served to fan the flame of Christianity as the Gospel spread throughout the known world.

